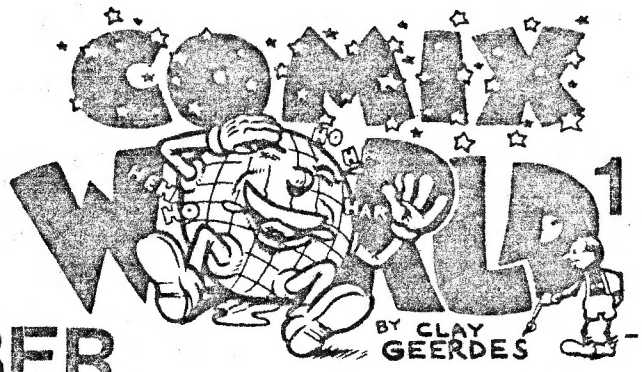

OCTOBER '73

Like any piece of writing, this column has always left the control of the writer the moment it was turned over to an editor. Perhaps that is as it should be, editors being responsible for putting together a number of unrelated items and making of them an aesthetic whole, but for the reader it often results in confusion. An editor is never an expert on all of the subjects which appear in his publication. How then can he know what to cut out and what to include? He can't and doesn't. What he does is select what HE thinks most important and chop out the rest. The same applies to illustrative material. The editor has the power to choose whatever he likes and surround a writer's prose with it, be it appropriate or not. This columnist has often winced at the misconceptions and distortions of meaning and intention perpetrated by his editors, and, after one bummer too many, he has decided to control the material completely or not to publish it at all.

COMIX WORLD began shortly after the first phase of underground comix. It was named by Richard Kyle who ran the material in his GRAPHIC STORY WORLD. Intended as an information service open to artists, fans, publishers, and anyone else interested in the comix, it has run in numerous underground papers for over three years. Contained in the columns is a running history of every facet of underground comix. There are photographs of most of the artists, sketches of their lives, and bibliographies and reviews of their books. When I started COMIX WORLD, no one was reviewing the ugs at all, and most fanzines were lacking in information about this new movement in American graphic art. I made it a point to talk to all of the artists willing to talk to me. The reactions were interesting. Some artists put me on, others put me down, but a larger number saw a need for what I was doing and gave me their cooperation.

Before COMIX WORLD, there was no way for the readers and potential artists of ugs to know where things stood in the industry. Those in the local gossip circuit knew which books were in the works, which were open to submissions, which closed, etc., but anyone outside the Bay Area had no way of knowing what was up. Well, some artists want the ugs to be a closed trip, but that is not the way I understood the initial conceptions. For me, ZAP opened up the medium again, freed cartooning from eastern control; it meant, in essence, that any artist might get some bristol and ink and work out a story with the knowledge that it had a good chance of being included in an underground comic.

COMIX WORLD began at a time when the industry was productive and optimistic. The artists were all working and the morale was high. A lot of new books were coming out every month, and many more were in the planning stage. That is not what is happening right now in mid-Fall 1973. What is happening is economic depression and the morale is at its lowest. Few books are coming out. Print runs are small. Companies like KRUPP

COMIC WORKS in Milwaukee and COMPANY & SONS in San Francisco have ceased to publish. The only two underground publishers who remain solvent at this time are THE PRINT MINT in Berkeley and LAST-GASP ECO-FUNNIES in San Francisco and both are behind in their publishing schedules. Neither are taking on any new books. Most of the established underground cartoonists have completed books waiting to go to press, and one publisher told me quite frankly: "It's over for the peripheral artists."

Why? Well, the companies were hurt by the Supreme Court Decision on Obscenity. Not directly, but indirectly. Numerous small stores around the country simply decided to stop carrying the sex-oriented undergrounds rather than take the chance that they would be busted under the new ruling. This meant that THE PRINT MINT got returned ZAPS instead of checks. The operating funds cut down, publication schedules had to be revised, and some books were postponed, others, like SPACED OUT 2 and YELLOW DOG, cancelled. No doubt many artists' royalties were effected with a resultant lowering of their morale.

Add a shortage of newsprint and increased printing costs and you may begin to see where the problem becomes serious. over or underground, the comics depend upon regularity and continuity. This is why publishers like Ron Turner have fought to maintain titles like SKULL and SLOW DEATH FUNNIES. Each issue builds an anticipation for the next. Fans go in a comic book store and ask: "Is the new SPIDERMAN out?" but they ask: "Is there going to be a YOUNG LUST 4?" because there is no guarantee that an underground title that appears once will ever appear again. The overgrounds have built up a confident readership in their 35 year history. Barely five years old, the undergrounds have yet to come close. ZAP fans had to wait two years between five and six.

What's going on right now in spite of the depression? PRINT MINT has four coming out this month. Justin Green's SHOW AND TELL, SAN FRANCISCO COMIC BOOK 4, MANHUNT, and one I haven't found out about yet. Turner has scheduled four: Lee Marrs' ADVENTURES OF PUDGE, Charles Dallas' PSYCHOTIC ADVENTURES 2, John Thompson's ETERNAL TALES 2, and a book called ORGANIC which he will distribute for Hector Tellez and Larry Todd. Others on his fall schedule include Barney Steel's ARMAGEDDON 3, Richard Corben's GRIM WIT 2 (color), Vaughn Bode's CHEECH WIZARD/SCHIZOPHRENIA, and a book called snapper to be distributed for Greg Miller. At the San Diego Con in August, Mike Moore said that Los Angeles Comic Book Company was publishing L. A. COMICS 2 and WEIRD FANTASIES 2, but it's October and no books. The Rip-Off Press has two reprint books out this month: THE BEST OF WONDER WART-HOG #1 by Shelton, and JESUS COMICS #3 by Foolbert Sturgeon. FREAK BROTHERS 2 has been reprinted along with FREAKS #1 on pink stock. #3 is promised for this Fall. Joyce Sutton and Chin Lively have finished the art for TITS 'N' CLITS 2 so Nannygoat Productions may have a new one out in November.

My advice to you new artists is hang on to your stuff. Coming to the Bay Area and making the rounds this Fall would just bum you out, because nobody is taking on any new books and there's no front money to be found. As soon as I get any new info, I'll pass it on to you.